

Joe McBride

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Interview by Harvey Cline

Just days away from his seventh release, pianist Joe McBride sat down with Smooth Views to discuss the upcoming disc and tour.....

Smooth Views (SV): *Congratulations on completion of your seventh disc, **Texas Hold 'Em** which will be released September 27th. What was the inspiration for the new material after a three-year absence from recording?*

Joe McBride (JM): Well, actually the record company. Some of the executives from the label came up with the idea of **Texas Hold 'Em** from the popular card game. It's really gained popularity. The similarities are parallel to playing the game and playing jazz. It's a very cunning, sort of secretive game where music is the same way. The record company kind of came up with the idea of **Texas Hold 'Em** with similarities to jazz and the poker game. The poker game is very much about using the unknown to your advantage which is the same as you do in music when improvising. You just make it up as you go along. You're wondering what everybody has. Music and jazz is popular not with just the young but with the middle aged and the old.

SV: *I guess if you think about it, they've both been around for a long time, and still continue to grow in popularity. Do you have any favorites on the disc yet?*

JM: Let's see. It's kind of hard to say. It's changed as time as gone along especially when I'm right in the middle of one, and that's my favorite. I think I like number one and number two tunes would be my favorite right now. "Big Slick" and actually number three "Double Down" are two of my favorites.

SV: *You mentioned "Big Slick." That has a lot of catchy phrases on it and some nice sax work. How did this one come about?*

JM: I actually hadn't thought about the poker idea until they brought it to me after the fact. We started listening to the tunes and checking out the moves and "Big Slick" would be great for the number one tune. It's a catchy bright tune that gets your attention, a first move. That sort of thing.

SV: *Did you write this one?*

JM: Yes, I wrote all the tunes except for "In A Gadda de Vida"

SV: *You mentioned that one. How did it come about? Was it a favorite of yours?*

JM: Actually my producer was messing around with that. He said, "You know, that would really be a good tune to put into jazz." He said "the old tune, the old 60's tune Inna Godda Davida." I really didn't agree with him at

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the time, so he went into the studio overnight and put the music down and I came back the next day and put the melody on it. It's got a good hook to it, and it's from back then so people would remember it and would be something to give young folks too.

SV: *To be honest with you, I didn't recognize that tune until I had listened to it a few times. When I picked that up, I said, "Oh wow. I know this one from a few years back." How does your music change once you bring it into the studio and you present it to your band? I'm sure that with the crew you have now, it changes quite a bit.*

JM: Yeah. Well the thing that I really get a kick out of that's incredible is that usually when I conceive the pieces I have everything on computer in my home studio, lay the parts down then I go back and replace some of the parts like guitar, bass and some of the drums and horns with real instruments. It's just amazing to see it blossom, and then to get the engineer in the mix (who's a very talented musician as well, Martin Walters) and for him to put his influences on it. It's amazing to see it grow in front of your eyes.

SV: *Does it ever take different turns than what you expected from it initially?*

JM: Usually almost always. Not so much of a great departure just a different outcome.

SV: *When do you decide if you're going to add vocals or not?*

JM: I usually try to put vocals on all of my CDs. Piano is my first instrument and I did not begin to sing until high school or college. Then I figured hey, it's an added asset and I enjoy singing a lot. We try to do two or three vocals on each CD and sort of mix it up.

SV: *It always adds a lot. Have you ever considered singing with anyone else such as Phil Perry or George Benson? Your styles compliment each other.*

JM: It would definitely be an honor. I'd welcome the opportunity if it ever presented itself. They are a couple of my favorite heroes. Phil Perry and I actually did a vocal tune on one of my albums called **Double Take**. So I did get a chance to play with him.

SV: *Many of your songs have upbeat tempos mixed with syncopated rhythms. Where do you draw this inspiration from because your music is so positive?*

JM: From a lot of different avenues, lot of different venues. I grew up listening to just about anything that they would play on the radio that I could get into. I enjoyed doing gospel growing up in St. Louis, R&B, soul and funk. Then later on in life going to college being introduced to classical and jazz. I also enjoyed the great vocalists from Al Jarreau to Ella Fitzgerald to Stevie Wonder, of course just to name a few.

SV: *It always seems positive and comes across that way. On most of your discs and at concerts, you're seen smiling. So you really seem like a genuinely happy person and I think your music reflects that.*

JM: Well it's a labor of love. It's an amazing magic that music has, and the effect it has on people. No matter what's going on in the world, you can go to a concert and just forget about it for a while. It lifts your spirit. We're all a part of that, too, up there. We have to have that in our hearts in order to share that with others. It's a lot of fun. It's hard work to put out an album and do all of that, but it's definitely a lot of fun. We're really enjoying ourselves when we're on stage and in the studio, too.

SV: *Speaking of touring, what kind of tour do you have scheduled with the new disc?*

JM: I plan to tour as many places as possible. Actually this coming week I'm coming out to L.A. to take part in a benefit for hurricane Katrina. We're going to have some celebrities out there. We've gone to South Africa and parts of Europe, Spain and Germany numerous times in the past and I do expect that we'll be doing the same.

SV: *Is there any place that we can see your touring schedule?*

JM: We're actually just getting things warmed up. I think you can go to the web site (www.Headsup.com) to check that out. I do know that we are slotted to go back to Africa sometime next year either in March or February... South Africa, Cape Towne, Johannesburg. But we also enjoy going around the country, too. We've got everything from cities in California, New York and Florida so I expect we'll be doing that. But I'm sure if you go to the website they'll have the schedule up there.

SV: *You mentioned Dallas earlier, and I know that you live in that area. What's happening in the Dallas jazz scene these days? I know that it was a hotbed of jazz a couple of years ago.*

JM: Oh, there's an amazing array of musicians, incredible talent. With the University of North Texas, which I attended back in the 80s, being one of the best schools in the world, naturally you get a lot of people instead that would go out to the east or west coast that end up staying in Dallas and playing here. It's amazing the talent in the city.

SV: *I read that you had mentioned that Dallas, being in the center where it is, you get so much influence from the east, the south, the north and the west.*

JM: Certainly. You know we're not that far from New Orleans and the south so we get a lot of Cajun and zydeco type of music and gospel and a lot of R&B. So yeah, it's easily a centrally-located area and it's easy to get in and out from either coast. So because of that we get a lot of people that come through, and some leaving the next day.

SV: *I've been listening to some of your earlier discs this week, and **Texas Blues Cruise** is one of my favorites, and one that I saw you perform live in Wilmington, Delaware a few years ago.*

JM: Well, we're actually going to be in Rehoboth Beach in a couple of weeks. We'll be there the 12th and 13th of October. It's a little story made up about me driving... of course I'm visually impaired... it's me driving, and almost missing the freeway and meeting this hot seniorita on the road, picking her up and driving down to Austin and almost getting into a big fight. Then we drive to Houston and San Antonio and look up the Texas Rhythm Club, which is my group. It's a lot of fun.

SV: *The play on words is what makes it and you even mention having a "blind date" in one part. Every time we listen to it we crack up.*

JM: I tell her "she had it coming; I'm not your usual blind date." (laughter)

SV: *Another one that I enjoy is one that you actually named after the artist that plays on it. What was the story behind "Just for the Koz" from your **Double Take** disc?*

JM: Well, we've appreciated working with Dave for a number of years in the past. He's also on my album **Gift To Tomorrow**. It seemed appropriate to name that after him. We've played a number of festivals and shows together.

SV: *When you're not recording or touring, what do you do for fun there in Texas?*

JM: Well, we go camping. I love the outdoors. I love to read. I like listening to television programs. I like stuff like the History Channel, Discovery and that type of thing. I enjoy cooking, just being with friends.

SV: *I'm sure the music part of your business takes up a lot of your time.*

JM: Oh yeah, it's a labor of love. As I said, it's an enjoyment but like anything it's nice to take a break from it. It just makes you appreciate it that much more once you get back to it.

SV: *I'm sure it's really a good feeling once you've put all that music to bed and you've pressed the disc and the release date is set. You just shoot the disc out there and see the reaction.*

JM: It's nothing like sitting back in your home just listening to your CD. I try not to listen to it that often so that I don't get burned out... keep it fresh. It's an even greater high to hear yourself being played on the radio. That's just an amazing feeling. I guess the best thing is being able to play live in front as a musician, and for everyone to be enjoying it, that's the greatest to me.

SV: *Is there anything you'd like to tell your fans out there?*

JM: Just thanks for their support and enjoying the music. Here comes another record and I hope you enjoy it as well. Come out to the concerts. We expect to meet and greet and play some more music for you real soon.

SV: *Well we just want to wish you all the luck with your new disc. Personally, I've really enjoyed listening to it over the past couple of weeks.*

JM: Great, thank you very much Harvey.

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